Nitrate in Private Well Water

Drinking water with high levels of nitrate is unsafe for everyone, but especially for babies (less than 6 months old) and pregnant women.

Test Your Well for Nitrate Every Year

Because **you cannot smell, taste, or see nitrate in your water**, the DNR (Department of Natural Resources) recommends that you test for nitrate at least once a year.

Test more often if:

Babies or pregnant women use the water.

You notice a change in color, taste, or smell of the water.

Test right away

A new well is built.

You have not tested your well in the past five years.

Test twice a year (two tests, done 6 months apart)

Nitrate has been found in wells in every county in Wisconsin

Nitrate naturally occurs in plants and animals. Nitrate can enter groundwater from fertilizers and animal and human waste (poop).

Understand Your Well Test Results

As a well owner, you are responsible for your own water.

Your local health department can help explain your test results and options for fixing and improving your well.

If your nitrate-nitrogen level is:

0-10 mg/L

Water is safe for drinking, preparing food, showering, and household chores.

More than 10 mg/L

Women who are or may become pregnant and babies should **immediately** stop using the water for drinking and preparing foods that use a lot of water like infant formula, soup, and rice. Do not boil the water.

Everyone else should avoid long-term use of water for these purposes.

Everyone can use the water for other activities like showering and household chores.

Take Action to Fix Your Well!

The next page has options for keeping you and your family safe. Remember to regularly test your water as it can change over time.

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Steps to take if your well has high nitrate:

1. Retest your well to confirm results

- Collect a second sample (called a "confirmation sample") to determine if the first result is accurate.
- **Consider testing for pesticides** as they can be found in wells with high nitrate.

2. Inspect your well

- Inspect the seal on the well cap and the above-ground casing for holes or other signs that surface contaminants may be entering the well.
- Consider having the well inspected by a licensed well driller or pump installer.

3. Protect your well from nitrate contamination

- Reduce your fertilizer use.
- Make sure your septic system is well maintained and pumped regularly to prevent overflow.

4. Use a safe water source

Use bottled water or water from a well without a nitrate problem for drinking and preparing food until you find a long-term solution. Do not boil the water from your well as this does not remove the nitrate.

5. Find a long-term solution

The following are long-term solutions to find a way to drink safe water.

$$ Install a water treatment system

- Work with a water treatment professional to select a certified treatment device. **DNR approval may be required before installing a water treatment system.**
- These systems require regular maintenance and testing to ensure they are working properly.
- **Point of Use (POU)** systems treat water coming from one faucet like a kitchen sink, but can use a lot of water and are not as effective with high levels.
- **Point of Entry (POE)** systems treat all water coming into the house and provide safe drinking water throughout the house.

$$$ Drill a New Well

- A new well is often a permanent solution, although there is no guarantee that it will be free from contaminants. It is always important to work with a licensed well driller.
- Financial help may be available in limited situations. Check out DNR's Well Compensation Grant Program for more information.

$$$ Connect to a Public Water Supply or Community Well

- Connecting to a public water supply can provide a permanent safe water supply; however, annexation may be required. Contact your local government with questions.
- Connecting to a community well can also provide a permanent safe water supply where costs for maintaining and testing the well are shared by multiple families.

For more information on safe drinking water, visit DHS' water page.

For more information on well construction and other safe water tips, visit DNR's well page.